

# STRANGER THINGS



# Armageddon

## Armageddon Book 6: Gravity by [inktopia](#)

**Series:** Stranger Things - Armageddon [7]

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M

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**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Martin Brenner, Mike Wheeler, Murray Bauman, Nancy Wheeler, OC - Character, Scott Clarke, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

Eleven goes to school, and Mike falls in love with his soulmate all over again. Jim Hopper confronts his past to save his daughter's future, and Murray Bauman recruits new interns to complete his most significant work. In the meantime, the world slowly starts turning upside-down as Joyce sets the stage for the most fabulous birthday party ever.

In the world of Stranger Things, the twin hounds of Justice were unleashed at last. They would hunt Martin Brenner until the end of time.

[Completed]

## **1. Act I: The Scenthound**

### **Author's Note:**

First time experimenting with multiple timelines and perspectives. This episode draws heavily from my past arcs but I've given some context. And we finally discover the history of the term 'Coffee and Contemplation.'

PS: Scenthounds are a type of hound that primarily hunts by scent rather than sight.

# STRANGER THINGS



## Armageddon

**Prologue:**

It was a quiet night in a suburb somewhere in the state of Indiana,

USA. A woman was briskly walking down a pavement with her dog. She was enjoying the late-night walk. The weather was beautiful, and there were no thieves or murderers around. She thought '*Maybe America isn't so crazy as my cousins think.*'

She was about to turn a corner when suddenly a car burst through the garbage bins lining the sidewalk and came straight for her.

She had only seen driving like that in the movies, the front tires were turned away from the bend, and the rear tires were spewing blue smoke as the rubber burnt from friction. The car screamed through the curve and at the last moment, the woman managed to dive towards her left. She heard the engine roar to life as the driver released the brake and pressed the gas, then the car was gone in a flash. The woman got up a moment later and saw her dog standing right next to her, wagging its tail. She cursed in Spanish, "Americans are actually crazy. Who drives like this at 10.50PM?"

She quickly turned around to return home.

The car ran three red lights back to back, exited the interstate and nearly crashed into a sedan that was about to enter the highway. The driver of the vehicle lowered his window and cursed loudly, "Fucking assholes!"

The other car kept accelerating through the narrow lane like a chariot driven by the horses of the apocalypse. The driver in the sedan kept muttering expletives as a V8 growl faded into the background noise.

## **Episode 2: Gravity**

### **Act I: The Scenthound**

Mike Wheeler was a boy who didn't believe in luck. He made that decision while lying in a classroom where the lights flickered, and an impossible nightmare kept rolling sixes one after another. On that fateful night, Mike had decided that luck was an excuse for people who had allowed fate to control their destiny. Because if luck really

existed, then Mike Wheeler was the unluckiest bastard alive. He would instead take chances battling his fate.

But a lifetime later, while riding on his mom's car on the way to school, Mike couldn't shake off the feeling that he might have been too hasty while making that decision. Last night, Eleven, the telekinetic girl with the 'Poofy' hair and fluffy cheeks, had sneaked into his room to celebrate her first birthday and her father, Jim Hopper was the one who had orchestrated the entire event. Mike was sure that he hadn't done anything special to deserve that moment, maybe Luck was real after all.

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Murray Bauman was a man with a mission. His mission was to fuck his liver up before it could throw in the towel. He got up from the sofa and painfully made his way towards the liquor cabinet. He arched his back once he reached there and then gently opened the doors as if he was a grown-up opening Christmas present. He took out a bottle full of transparent and toxic liquid. '*Pure fuel*,' he took out a glass and poured a peg, thought about all the pain and suffering in the world and then added some more. His liver was feeling good today, '*Not on my watch, you won't*.' He was making his way back to his den when suddenly there was a loud bang on his door. Murray took a long sip from his glass and glared at the door, 'What good is a fucking door if people come and knock on it? Closed door means leave the inhabitant the fuck alone.' The banging continued, and Murray gulped the content of the entire glass in one go. The liquid burnt through his stomach and waged war against his liver. Murray went to the door, yanked it open and cursed loudly, "Fuck me sideways, not YOU again."

He looked in awe at the sight in front of him as if Santa Clause had come down himself to deliver his presents during Christmas. Then he lifted the bottle to his mouth and took a long drag. '*Vodka*,' he needed a lot of that shit to deal with this other shit that was standing at his door at 10 AM in the morning. '*Who the fuck visits people at 10 AM?*' But just like shit stuck to the bottom of the shoe, this one also didn't go away. He sighed and held the gate open as a couple walked into his man-cave. He slammed the door and started following them as they walked into his home with confidence that he had not seen

earlier. He admitted to himself with a grudge that he liked the pair. '*Pull-out*', he smirked as he remembered his last conversation with them. Nancy Wheeler came to a stop in the middle of the room and took out a folder from her bag. She slowly turned towards Murray, opened the folder and handed it over to him. Murray suddenly felt a tremendous craving for Battery Acid. The folder contained a picture of an article that was published a lifetime ago.

'*Monsters amongst us – Part 1.*' The second part was never published. Murray threw the bottle towards the door with maximum force.

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Karen drove the car towards the entrance of Hawkins Middle School and gently stopped it near the path leading to the gate. Mike got down from the car and kissed his mother. Then she ran her hand through his hair and smiled, "There's a plate missing from the kitchen. Now, if it's not in back in its place by tonight, you'll have to eat one extra plate of peas. Understand?"

She smiled like the devil and drove the car away. Mike wasn't surprised at all. His mother was actually an omnipotent Jedi master with an uncanny ability to read minds. His fate was sealed the moment Hopper drove away with the plate, *'Probably laughing like a maniac all the way. Crazy bastard!'*

Then as he turned back to climb the stairs, a flashbulb suddenly fired in front of his eyes and blinded him. A millionth of a moment later, Mike painfully opened his eyes and found himself standing inside a small room with orange floor and ceilings. The walls were made of something that disrupted his peripheral vision. Mike had a sinking feeling inside his stomach. This was a fragment of Eleven's memory, and in all probabilities, it was a nightmare.

When Mike stood ground against death and absorbed Eleven's memories in the field of the fireflies to save her, he literally lived all thirteen years of Eleven's life in a fraction of a moment. His mind couldn't handle that massive overload of information, so it locked

them someplace far away from his conscious mind. Sometimes these memories would get triggered and proceeded to show him a moment of Eleven's past. He was in one of them now and wanted to get the fuck out, some memories were too terrifying to witness. Then he turned his head to observe the room and immediately jumped back a few feet.

A small girl was sitting in one corner and crying by herself. Mike glanced at her and felt an immense sorrow inside his chest, he didn't know why but he sensed that the girl needed him. He made his way to the girl and bent over to get a good look, then he nearly lost his balance. The girl had big soulful eyes and a scared look on her face. *'Eleven?'* Mike gasped, but then he looked at her hair and breathed a sigh of relief. The girl had a shaved head, but a tinge of golden shadow was clearly visible, *'a blonde.'* Mike stood up and looked around the room. He had no idea about this memory, if this was Eleven's then it made no sense, he had never seen a memory with another girl before. Then he looked at the girl, and something rattled his heart. The girl was scared and was crying. Mike promised Eleven that he would never let her cry as long as he was alive, and this girl was another Eleven, waiting to be rescued. Mike sat beside her and gently placed a hand on her shoulder, "Hi, I'm Mike. I'm your friend."

In response, the girl looked at him and stared into his eyes. Mike's heart wrenched at the way her eyes fluttered, *'she is as scared as a deer in headlights.'* She parted her lips to reply but immediately jerked her head towards the front as the door opened. A woman with golden hairs and wearing a black suit walked in and closed the door. With a shock, Mike realized that he had seen the woman before. Last year, this woman had tried to capture Eleven in the school but ended up getting her brain blown out in the process. She spoke in a calm and soothing voice, "It's time to go sweetheart."

The girl didn't reply, she just kept staring at that woman as if she didn't understand or believe what she was hearing. The woman came close and gently lifted her in her arms. The girl buried her face in that woman's chest and started crying, "Mama! Please, no more tests." The woman just kept consoling her, "It'll be alright dear. Your Mama's here! Shhh!"

*'Eleven called Martin Brenner Papa!'* Mike remembered the lie.

He jumped up and ran towards them, "YOU'RE NOT HER MOTHER!"

But he was stopped by an invisible shield. It was just a memory, and the events had already been recorded in time. Mike followed the woman as she left the room. He went to the door and stopped, the world was blurred beyond the edge of the memory fragment. Mike turned toward the open door and saw a panel made of metal that read '013'. He squinted his eyes and saw the reflection of the woman on the panel. She was standing in front of a man. The reflection didn't carry enough details, but Mike noticed a head full of white hair and a dark tuxedo. '*Martin Brenner*', Mike gritted his teeth, but before he could move ahead, the flashbulb fired again.

Mike took a moment to compose himself, then looked at his watch and breathed a sigh of relief. Unlike Will's real-time visions, these would play within a few seconds. They were memories after all, '*Eleven's memories and my nightmares*'. He didn't want these memories any more than Eleven did but he needed to see them. There was a moment in Eleven's past during which an Angel was somehow transformed into the Devil. Mike needed to witness that moment if he was to stop the decadence once and for all. He would endure the horrors, '*anything to save her*'. He bowed his head and made his way to the classroom.

He found his friends in their respective seats and grinning at him as he entered the class. They were happy to see Mike in school after a long time. He moved towards his table and groaned, Max had skipped class and Jeffry occupied her place. That guy was an absolute asshole. But Mike didn't pay much attention to Jeffry, his favorite teacher was on his way to the class.

Mike had always liked Mr. Clarke's lectures. The man was a gifted orator, and he had a way of spinning magnificent stories out of mundane subjects that caught the attention of even the most bored students. Mike was looking forward to his lecture, it had been too long since he was out of school. Mr. Clarke entered the class and smiled at his favorite student, "Mr. Wheeler! Good to have you back. How are we doing today?"

"Pretty good sir, pretty good."

"Great. Let's start. But before we begin, I have a surprise for everyone."

Mike perked up, what was so unusual that Mr. Clarke needed to mention it? Mike hated surprises. And why was Will looking at him as if a gigantic hammer was about to fall on Mike?

"Dustin, drumroll please."

Dustin proceeded to slap the bench in front of him in a completely uninterested manner. He was getting tired of this drummer shit.

"Class, we have... MIKE! ARE YOU OKAY?"

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Joyce was gently humming a tune while cleaning the kitchen. It was getting late, but she needed to finish preparations for the big event tomorrow. She glanced at the clock that was ticking towards the infinity, '01:55 AM.' Suddenly there was a mild noise that came from the back door. Joyce felt her mouth becoming dry. Will was sleeping in the next room, and Jonathan was out of town for some assignment. She thought about the axe, but it was lying in the storage shack. Suddenly she heard a familiar knock, one that she had heard many times back in her college days. She ran towards the door and yanked it open.

"Hopper?"

"Thank God, you're home! I need your help." The man looked horrified.

"Okay?" Joyce breathed a sigh of relief, '*not a monster, neither the end of the earth.*'

"Joyce, please help me. It's about Eleven."

"What?"

"She is going to school tomorrow, and I don't have a fucking clue what she needs. Please, you gotta help me." Hopper looked like a man who was facing a firing squad.

Joyce laughed and covered her mouth, "What did you get her?"

"A bag, a copy and a pencil."

Joyce kept laughing, "That's all? You know it's not the fifties, right?"

"I know. But it's late, and all the stores are closed. Can we do a Midnight Raid?" There was mischief in Hopper's eyes.

"Just like old times, Jim?"

"Just like old times, Joyce."

They left the house in Hopper's van. Joyce wasn't confident about leaving Will all by himself, so She brought him along for the ride. They reached the store in some time, and Hopper parked the car near the back entrance. They got off the car and started walking towards the gate.

Hopper looked at Will and asked, "How are you holding up kid?"

"Good, pretty good. Mike's coming to school tomorrow."

"Yeah, I know. Listen, Eleven is also going to school tomorrow."

Will stopped in his tracks as his eyes widened and then a big grin appeared on his face.

Hopper sighed, "I know. But don't tell Mike. Eleven wants to give him a surprise."

Will was still laughing, "I Won't. I want to see his face."

They reached the back gate and Hopper took out a small metal rod from his jacket. His eyes twinkled with expectation as he turned towards Joyce, 'Midnight raid.' She rolled her eyes and opened the gate with a key and went inside. Hopper sighed and put the mini-crowbar away. Once inside, Joyce took a flashlight from an aisle and pointed it towards the ground, "Don't turn on the lights. Don't flash the torch towards the windows. They could call the police."

"I am the police," Hopper was confused but then he laughed. A

lifetime ago Hopper and Joyce had broken into this very store to steal some scotch. They ended up spending the rest of the night in the police station with a massive hangover.

They spent the next fifteen minutes finding various items that a young girl might need to survive school. Hopper crouched beside Joyce who was trying to find some chocolates, and whispered, "Thanks for the cake."

"How did it go?"

"I have no clue. I spent the better part of the hour donating blood to some mosquitos in my van. Eleven did come back with a massive grin on her face."

"You didn't spy on them?"

"I swear. And what would they do? Host a candlelight dinner with Eggos and Cakes?"

Joyce smiled as she took out a box of chocolates, '*Jim was beginning to trust the bond between Mike and Eleven.*'

Hopper was muttering to himself, "It was a small kiss. Just a cute little peck. ON THE LIPS!"

Joyce spoke quietly, "I've finished the arrangements. Bring her to my place by Seven PM."

"Who did you invite?"

"Everyone who loves her. I've already informed the parents. The kids will be spending the night at my place." Joyce was really excited. It was her daughter's birthday after all. She'll make it a grand one.

Suddenly there was a loud crash at the back where Will had gone to find some crayons. Before Joyce could jump, Hopper ran towards the sound with a gun in his hand. Joyce reached a moment later and saw a pile of notebooks scattered on the floor. A small hand was visible under the rubble, and it was trying its best to get the owner out of the mess. Joyce breathed a sigh of relief and Hopper went ahead to help. Once the notebooks were put back in place, Hopper pointed

towards the exit, "I think we better go now. We have what we need. And here's the cash."

Joyce pushed Hopper's hand away, "You remember what you asked me the night of the Snowball? Don't you dare, Jim. Today's her birthday."

Hopper gave up and put the cash into the donation box for the disabled. Just before leaving, Joyce picked up an elongated box from an aisle and handed it over to Hopper, "Have her wear this tomorrow. Let's not take any chances."

Once Joyce locked the gate, they turned around and started walking towards the van. The streetlights were not working, and the moon was covered by the clouds. It was pitch dark outside. Hopper brought out the flashlight to light the path ahead of them, *'Maybe the lab really made electricity.'*

He was doing most of the talking, "Thanks for the help, Joyce. I was packing her bag when I realized I fucked up big time. I am an idiot."

"It's okay, good thing that you came to me. How's Mike?"

"Doing better, the kid's a fighter."

"That he is Jim, that he is."

"I just wish they could lead a normal.... WHAT THE FUCK?"

Hopper was moving the flashlight around as they were walking towards his van. The light swept a broad arc across the car and in that fraction of illumination, they saw something crouching on top of the hood. It looked like a severely deformed man. It had a long tail and a dark flesh covered body that was way out of proportion to be a human or any animal they had ever seen. It was looking at the windshield with a face that vaguely resembled a snout. Hopper quickly swept the flashlight back towards the hood, but the abomination was gone. The light reflected on an afterimage that glowed for a moment and then faded away. Hopper had already taken out his gun and was holding it pointed towards the van. Joyce was clutching on to Will with one hand and holding on to Hopper's

arm with the other. Her face had already turned white, 'Not this again.'

Hopper whispered through his teeth, "Did you all see that?"

"Ye.... Yes."

"What the hell was that? Will?"

"I.... I don't know. Didn't look like anything from before." The strain was evident in his shaking voice.

The streetlights were still not working, and the moon showed no sign of coming out of hiding. They reached the van one step at a time, then climbed aboard. Hopper turned the key and stepped on the gas, 'I need a bigger gun.'

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Murray Bauman was sitting on the sofa with a distant expression on his face. He was trying to find memories that were hiding somewhere deep inside his soul. He never wanted to bring them up until he was ready, but that day never came. He looked at Nancy and spoke with a sad voice, "Where did you get this picture?"

In response, Nancy snatched the bottle away from Murray's hand, took a long sip and choked immediately, 'battery acid?'

On the night of the Snowball, Nancy was returning home with Jonathan while Mike was riding back on his bicycle. Nancy was feeling really happy. She didn't lie to Dustin, she really liked him the best amongst her brother's friends. Jonathan dropped Nancy at her house around midnight, but Mike never reached home. He had crashed his bicycle into a car which severely injured him and nearly ended his life. Somehow Hopper and Eleven found Mike lying in the street, promptly brought him to the hospital and saved his life. Others did not have a problem believing the story, but Nancy wasn't born yesterday. Back in the hospital when everyone was trying to comfort Mike as he came to his senses, Nancy was looking at Dr. Owens. He had just winked at Mike before leaving the room. Nancy had a suspicious feeling, but before she could follow him, Eleven left her chair and started moving away from the bed. But then Mike

thrust his arm out, caught Eleven's arm and held it in a grip that indicated an absurd idea. Mike was more concerned about Eleven than she was about him. Nancy glanced at the door and walked out to find the man who owed her an explanation.

Nancy found Dr. Owens and Hopper sitting on a bench and whispering quietly. Dr. Owens was messaging his throat as if something was choking him a moment ago. Nancy observed the expression on both of their faces and knew that something was wrong, and it involved the young couple who were trying to find solace in each other arms back in that room. She went to the pair and spoke casually, "Hey, Hopper. Thanks for saving my brother last night."

"Don't mention it kid, it's my duty."

"Regarding your duty, where did you find him exactly?"

Hopper let out a sigh, "Near the fourth."

"Hmm, Mike takes that route sometimes. But your house is the other way, right?"

Hopper suddenly looked at Nancy, and she saw a shadow flickering in his eyes, '*doubt*'

"Eleven wanted to see him."

"Aww, you're such a caring father!"

Hopper wasn't amused, "You got a point kid?"

"Nope, just saying thanks. By the way, you said Mike suffered from a car crash, right?"

"Yeah" Hopper sighed, 'the girl's smart.'

"Mike needed a lot of blood. Must be some injury."

Hopper stared at Dr. Owens, but he was looking just as helpless as he was, '*I should have choked him to death*'

"Yet he was in the OT for a short time. I checked the logs." Nancy looked at Dr. Owens with a stare that could have melt steel.

There were two ways of bleeding out, either through an external injury or through an internal one. Car crashes may result in severe trauma, but an injury that required so much blood to recover would end up putting the patient in the OT for a long time. Mike was in the OT only for a while as if his wounds had already been healed before he was brought to the hospital. The surgeon just cleaned and bandaged the almost healed wound and then placed the patient on the bed. Then blood packs were used to refill the patient's body with the much-needed blood. It must have been magic, and Nancy knew a magician who was sitting right beside Mike at the moment.

Dr. Owens shrugged and looked at Hopper who nodded and asked Nancy to sit down. Then he proceeded to tell Nancy a story that came straight out of a thriller novel mixed with science fiction and sprinkled with a tinge of horror. A year back, Nancy would have rolled her eyes, but this time she listened with attention. Once Hopper was done speaking, he looked at the ground and spoke in an apologetic tone, "I really wish I could do something. But right now, I have no clue where that fox is hiding. It'd be best if you could somehow convince your mother to take Mike away for some time. Maybe to a vacation at a faraway place. The further he moves away from Eleven the better for him."

Nancy nodded absently because she knew it would be impossible to separate them and they needed each other more than ever. She also knew that Hopper would be of no help, he would place Eleven's safety above Mike's. Any father would do that, but Nancy knew a journalist who was a bit too interested in a lab situated in a sleepy town named Hawkins, Indiana. She went to the library, got pictures of all the articles about the monster and came straight to Bauman the next day.

Murray listened to Nancy's story and emptied half of the bottle of water that he had somehow retrieved from the back of the sofa. It all made sense, but he wished it didn't. If there was one man in this world who would never go to hell, it was Martin Brenner. *'The man was already living in one.'*

"Why did you come to me?"

"Because you were awfully interested in the lab for it to be a simple coincidence."

*'The girl's intelligent. She'd be a great journalist one day. If she lives past this year,'* Martin grimaced at the thought. He held the bottle to his mouth and emptied the remaining half in one go. Nancy and Jonathan were surprised to see Murray drinking water for a change, but in another life, Murray Bauman was a teetotaller. He also had a head full of jet black hair and didn't allow his beard to grow beyond a French-cut.

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Over a lifetime ago, somewhere in a city that never sleeps, a brilliant journalist named Michael Brown was standing on the pavement and smoking a Havana. The weather was pleasant, and a slight breeze snaked through the cold concrete jungle and made him shiver. He was casually observing the street when a yellow cab stopped in front of him. A song was playing loudly inside the cab. Michael remembered the lyrics, *'Killing me softly with his song'* by Roberta Flak. The song was released sometime back and hit the Billboard bulls-eye. It would play in the radios all day long. Michael also knew a girl who liked the song. He flashed a wide grin and went to the car as a tall girl climbed out and hugged him, "And how's my Journalist doing today?"

Michael laughed, "Just saving the world."

"Really?"

"Yup. Fit the final piece of the puzzle today. The article goes live tomorrow."

The girl smiled at him, she really liked the man who would go to any length to find the truth. She waved at a couple who were moving away from them. A small child peeked from her mother's shoulder and flashed a toothless smile at her. She laughed as the child proceeded to make a funny face, "You really got that bastard for good."

Michael just nodded, "Martin Brenner would never see the sun as long as he's alive. Just wait for tomorrow's front page."

The girl looked at him with a dark expression, "He doesn't deserve to live."

Martin hardened his jaw and spoke with determination, "Don't worry Lisa. I know everything about him now. He won't be able to hide from justice anymore."

But he was wrong, Martin did not hide from Justice. It was the other way around.

## **2. Act II: The Sighthound**

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Sighthounds are breeds of hunting dogs that primarily hunt by sight and speed.

### **Episode 2: Gravity**

#### **Act II: The Sighthound**

"Mike! You okay?" Mr. Clarke sounded alarmed.

Mike couldn't answer because he had just managed to fall from his seat. He was then succeeded by Lucas who looked like as if he had seen a ghost. Dustin kept slapping the table and frankly, he was giving an encore. Will was laughing like a maniac.

Eleven had just walked into the class, and she looked absolutely gorgeous. Mike had seen different versions of Eleven in the past, the one with the buzzcut hair and boyish face, the one with the black eyeshadow and pulled back hair, the one with the 'Poofy' hair and fluffy cheeks, the one with the devil may care look and murderous intent, but she had never looked so beautiful as she was looking today. She wore a white shirt and blue jeans, and her hair was neatly tucked behind her ears with a hairband. She had no makeup but still looked stupendous, but the most distinguishing feature was a bright red spectacle that covered her eyes. Two streaks of red bars emerged from corners of the frame and vanished behind her pointy ears to make her face appear angular and graceful. Mike fell in love with the girl who could do the impossible, all over again, and then he merely fell from his seat.

He got up and twisted his face. Mr. Clarke eyed him suspiciously and introduced Eleven as the niece of Hopper. Her name was Jane Hopper, and she would be studying with them for some time.

Jeffrey was staring at the new girl as if she was his favorite ice

cream. She was cute and looked nothing like the other girls in the class. She carried a certain sense of authority as if she knew that she could beat the shit out of every student, all at once. Not to mention her eyes that somehow mimicked the bottomless depths of a lake. But at the same time, there was a subtle feminine touch that pointed towards a soft and compassionate soul.

*'She is just damn pretty.'*

He flashed a wide beam at the new girl. He was confident that she could not escape the charm of Jeffry Sullivan, the guy who had taken Clara, the reigning beauty queen, to Snowball last year. But in a moment Jeffry sighed as he noticed that she was looking and smiling nervously at Mike Wheeler for some god damn reason. *'Must be freaked out by that alien.'* He shouldn't have sat beside that loser today, *'Dude's unlucky as a mirror broken by a black cat.'*

But to his delight, the girl got down from the pedestal and slowly walked towards him calmly and confidently. Jeffry flashed a wide grin, *'Still got it.'* The girl came to him, stopped for a moment and then gently spoke, "Get out."

Mike fell from his chair again as Lucas buried his face in his hand. Dustin kept doing the drumroll, but now it sounded like the Apache war drums, and Will was pressing his hands against his mouth to control the laughter. Jeffry kept looking at the girl with sheer curiosity and then suddenly felt a pressure in his lower abdomen. *'Shit,'* he got up to run away to the washroom. Eleven sat down on the chair and flashed a smile, "Good morning, Mike."

Mike could only stare in awe and didn't notice that the entire classroom was staring at him as if was a hero that had come alive from the legends. Mike didn't give a shit, he had enough problems in his mind. Eleven was a beautiful girl, and the entire class had every right to ogle her. That wasn't a problem. When it came to Eleven, Mike was so far ahead in the race that the competition wasn't even visible. The problem was that Eleven still didn't possess the necessary aptitude to function in human society. Mike was terrified about the prospective outcomes, but then the image of a small child flashed in his mind. He hardened his jaw. He'll guide her through this shit, or get expelled from the school in the process, *'whatever it takes.'*

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It was way past midnight when a light came to life in a cabin somewhere in the woods. Hopper moved his finger away from the switchboard and carefully assessed his surroundings. Eleven was fast asleep in her room, probably exhausted after spending an exciting hour with Mike. Tomorrow she would go to school and enter the next phase of her life. Hopper finally felt like growing old. He placed the package on the table and carefully made his way to a corner of the room. His past was buried down there, and it was finally time to visit them. The upside down or '*whatever it was this time*' had started encroaching into this world again. The monster he saw tonight near the store was nothing like what he or the others had seen before. Hopper tried to imagine the abomination that he had seen only for an instant. It had long arms and legs and a long tail which hinted towards a lithe and fast body. The snout had inch-long fangs, and there were no eyes. But the creature could somehow feel its surrounding because it disappeared a moment after the flashlight streaked by the hood. Hopper needed better weapons. He crouched over a wooden floorboard, inserted a flathead screwdriver in the gap and gently pressed the handle. The floorboard came up in a smooth motion, and a large trap door appeared on the ground. Hopper caught the screwdriver in his teeth and yanked a metal ring that was resting on the edge of the door, it struggled a bit but then gave away to the determination. A man going back to his past was literally unstoppable because he knew his way.

He placed his hands on the edge and then slid the lower part of the body into the hole. Then he let go and fell amongst a bunch of boxes and files with a loud thump, 'I'm getting too domesticated for this shit.' He fumbled to find the flashlight and after a moment clicked a button that gave birth to a small circle of yellow light. He flashed that circle around to find his way and slowly went to the back. He stopped as the ring illuminated something lying on the floor. Hopper bent over and lifted a heavy bag from the floor. He needed a big fucking gun to deal with the shit that was sitting on his van tonight, and he knew just what the doctor prescribed. As he was about to open the chain, his eyes fell on a box lying on the rubble, and suddenly a curtain lifted from his eyes. He dashed to the box, yanked the lid away and took out an old file. It was covered in dust and grime. Hopper opened the file and sat down as his feet gave away, 'It

*was right in front of my eyes all along.'*

Hopper took out a photograph from the file and held it under the flashlight. It was a picture that nauseated him even to this day. It was a picture of a small girl. He was the one to have found her body in a ditch near an abandoned warehouse near the docks. The first time he had seen the body he promptly threw up. He was about to do the same today, but his empty stomach saved him. '*The Director*' was a curious piece of monstrosity, he would abduct his victims along with their families. Then proceed to murder one spouse in front of another, then kill the other one and then kidnap the child. He would hold the children for a few months and then murdered them as well. The police never found the reason why. But they noticed a strange time lag. '*The Director*' would only hold the children between three to five months before murdering them. It didn't make any sense. Hopper grimaced, '*Until today.*'

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Mike was thinking about the girl who was sitting beside him and devouring the knowledge that was radiating from Mr. Clarke. He was hoping that Mr. Clarke wouldn't remember the cute girl who hated Sweden and didn't speak much. Mr. Clarke turned towards the blackboard and started writing down some puzzles. Suddenly a piece of crumpled paper appeared out of nowhere and headed straight for Mr. Clarke's head. Mike watched in amazement as the paper flew towards Mr. Clarke in a lazy arc and then violently crashed against some invisible shield and went sideways. He gasped and looked at Eleven, her eyes twinkled, and he felt the air getting heavier. Before Mike could catch Eleven's arm, there was a loud crash behind them. Mr. Clarke turned around and saw another one of his students tumbling in the ground.

As soon as the bell rang, Mike jumped up from his seat, went to Eleven and grabbed her hand. Jeffry was trying to return to the classroom to get his bag. But like every time since that morning, he bent over as soon as he entered the class and ran away in haste. His intestines had waged war on him and won't let him leave the washroom. Mike lowered his face and whispered something in Eleven's ear, then she got up and resigned her seat. The jaws of

almost every student in the class crashed as Mike Wheeler, the biggest loser in Hawkins high, dashed out of the room with the hot girl in his arms, and she went giggling as if she was his girlfriend. Mike ran with Eleven as the guys followed close behind. They made their way to the staircase in a breathless run, and after reaching there, Mike hugged Eleven in a tight embrace.

"Dude, I mean seriously. In the school?" Dustin was never fond of couples. Lucas just shrugged. It wasn't so awful, he would've done it. Will winked at Eleven, and she smiled at him.

"Eleven? You came to school?" Mike hated surprises, but this one was turning out to be fantastic.

"Yes."

"I.... You.... The specs?"

"Hopper said that it'll hide my face." Eleven was cheerful. She liked her new specs.

"You look amazing. I love the glasses."

Eleven didn't respond but looked at Mike's shirt, she was already blushing at that point. Then Mike let go of Eleven, and the gang swarmed around her. She kept laughing as the guys hugged her and squeezed her hands. Mike stood back and watched the scene with satisfaction. Eleven needed friends and those three were the best the world had to offer. Dustin was jumping in excitement, "What cool things can you do now? Did you do Jedi mind training while you were gone? Can you read my mind? No, shit, wait."

Lucas objected, "Dude, she is not a toy."

"Can you shoot laser beams from your eyes?" Dustin wasn't ready to give up so quickly.

Eleven just smiled and shook her head sideways. Then she thrust her hand forward. Mike felt the air getting heavier and, in a moment, a set of loud bangs indicated that all the doors of the stairwell had been closed all at once. Eleven rotated her fist, and all the locks turned with a cacophony of clicks. Then she opened her palm and

gently lifted it upward. The ground moved away from their feet as all of them floated in the air. Dustin cried out in excitement, "Son of a bitch. We're all flying. WE ARE ACTUALLY FLYING."

Will laughed as Lucas kept trying to turn upside down. Mike smoothly glided upwards. They were still hovering a few feet above the ground, but they didn't feel any weight at all. As if the gravity in that area had been turned off. They were literally having the time of their life. Then someone banged the door above them, and Eleven brought them down slowly.

Dustin started jumping as soon as he landed, "That was so awesome. You can actually make us fly. We can have our own superhero team."

Mike came to Eleven and gently wiped the drop of blood that was dripping down from her nose. She had gotten really powerful over the last year, a power of this level would have resulted in a gush of blood before. The door on top of them opened, and a group of students came inside the stairwell. They look dumbfounded because they had no idea what was holding the door closed until then. Mike grimaced, the power was all good but pushing her beyond a limit could still bring out the doppelganger. He needed to solve the puzzle before time ran out. But for now, her powers have to be limited.

"Okay, we need to talk."

Mike sighed and put his arms on Eleven's shoulders, "You cannot use your powers in the school. People will notice. That's a problem because if they see a basketball hanging above the hoop, they might call the police. If they call the police, Hopper will come. Then he'll put me through the hoop and take you back. He'll never let you back in the school. Do you understand?"

Eleven was listening to Mike with complete attention. The others were feeling a bit nervous now. It had been a lifetime since Mike had scolded Eleven and she had grown up a lot in that time. But then Eleven smiled at Mike, "Okay."

*'Dude's a fucking wizard!'*

Mike looked at Eleven in the eyes and spoke softly, "Now that you're

here, I'll rather be with you as long as possible. So please, for the sake of both of us, do not use your powers, please." Eleven nodded furiously and smiled back at Mike.

The others were already trying to suppress their laughs by that time. *'Look at those two! Yuck!'*

Then suddenly Eleven clutched Mike's hands tightly, and a cold fury started raging in her eyes. A girl with fiery red hair had entered the staircase above them. '

*'She had skipped the first half.'*

Max came down the stairs and stood in front of the girl who was about to declare war on her, and no one knew why. Mike groaned, today will be a long day. Max didn't flinch in front of the approaching tornado. She was a girl, and she could see the signs that the boys had missed.

She addressed Eleven softly, "It's about Mike, isn't it?"

To the boys' amazement, Eleven nodded, "You want him."

Mike suddenly felt like Steve, two girls were fighting for him in the school, *'Come on Kingdom.'* Then he remembered a man whose jaw was moving sideways on its own and swallowed, *'SHIT.'*

Max thought for a moment and smiled, "You came to school on the day I was riding my skateboard around Mike in the gym."

Mike recalled that day vividly and buried his face in his palm, *'What is this? A cheesy soap opera produced by Fate? The girl manages to run away from prison to find her soulmate. Sees him with another girl who just happened to be hanging around for no good reason. Draws the wrong conclusion and runs away? Even I could write a better script to delay the reunion.'*

Max started laughing heartily, "It was nothing like that. I was just trying to impress him, so he would stop acting weird and accept me in the party. I was never interested in him in that way."

Max placed an arm on Eleven's shoulder, "And you know why he was

trying so hard to keep me out? Because he thought I was trying to replace you."

Mike wanted to die from shame if that was possible, '*Dear God, I was such an asshole.*'

Max looked at Lucas, "People often do that when they care so much for each other."

"Mike belongs to you, and you belong to him, Eleven. I promise that he's just my friend."

Max had a way of telling the truth, then she smiled, "You're the only one who's more than his friend."

Eleven looked at Mike with a rush of questions in her eyes. Mike grinned at her and squeezed her shoulder, he only wanted to be with Eleven. She breathed a sigh of relief and held her hand in front of Max, "I'm sorry."

Max clutched her hands tightly and grinned, "Wanna learn how to ride a skateboard?"

---

Hopper moved his flashlight around the box and found a photo frame. He picked it up and blew away the dust. Then he held it under the torch and smiled, '*Jim Hopper was not always a small-town cop.*' A lifetime ago, Jim Hopper was the name of a vicious greyhound in NYPD. He was smart, he was a war hero, and he was determined. He was like a hound on the trail of its hunt, and he would never let go once he set his sights on the prey. His latest target was a serial killer who was, in all respects, an anomaly. He remembered a session that he attended in Atlanta that was taken by some head honchos from FBI BAU. They had talked about patterns. They said that humans were straightforward complex machines. Humans would often behave in random ways, but to achieve that randomness they would have to follow a pattern. This was especially true for serial killers when a serial killer would go the extra mile to showcase a random behavior, he would have to think hard to follow a strategy to achieve that feat. 'The Director' was a murderer who would kill people at random times at random locations. The police were never able to find a pattern,

and they were going batshit insane to discover any little breadcrumb.

Hopper first heard the term coffee and contemplation after joining NYPD. There was a long history behind it. He was going through the newspaper one day and suddenly noticed a small poster for a theatre that hosted some obscure play which no one watched. He saw a short text that was inscribed below the banner.

*'Play timings for this month will be notified once we have received enough interest. Please confirm your slot by calling the following number.'*

It was a mundane poster. Theatres like these were on the verge of bankruptcy as the crowd slowly got pulled towards moving pictures on the screen. They could not afford to host plays regularly, so, they requested the patrons to notify the theatre about possible dates when they would be able to visit. Once enough interest was generated it would then host the play on the date with the most attention. Hopper sipped his coffee and started thinking hard. There was something about the past dates that were written in the poster.

Suddenly, old Martha walked in while shaking her head, "Those bastards. They'll let a random person select a random bunch of numbers to decide the winner. How's that fair? What if that guy's unlucky for me? I never win anything." She crumpled a lottery ticket and threw it into the dustbin.

She dropped a file at Hopper's desk and grumbled, "Hopper? You listening?"

Hopper was humming a tune.

"Would you stop contemplating over coffee and look at these files? They found another body today. Chief wants you to go take a look asap. It's quite horrible this time."

In a moment, a light bulb flashed in Hopper's mind, '*Theatre,' 'Director,' 'No fixed dates,' 'Random dates selected by patrons.*' The best way to pick a random pattern would be to select a random group of people to generate the pattern. It was a long shot, but it was all they got at the moment. He got up, kissed Martha and ran towards the room where Alex sat. The old geezer was a passionate follower of

obscure plays.

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It was lunchtime in Hawkins Middle School. Mike came down to the cafeteria with his friends. Eleven was walking right beside him. She kept looking around the big hall with amazement in her eyes. She had spent most of her life either locked up in the lab, or hiding inside a tent made of blankets, or lost inside deserted woods or locked inside a cabin. To her, this was the grandest view she had ever had, except Mike, he was still the best. Before leaving the staircase, she had asked Mike to hold her hand while they walked around the school. For some reason, the others started laughing as Mike's face went red and he started stuttering. Eleven felt worried, was Mike sick? But then Mike told her that it was not usual to hold hands inside the school, but he promised that he would not leave her side. So, they started their grand tour of the school. They visited the old classroom where Eleven had embraced her destiny and said goodbye to Mike. The boys were unable to look at the wall where she had pinned the monster and destroyed it along with herself. She held their hands together and assured them that she'll never leave them again. Then they made their way to the stadium where Eleven had used a makeshift sensory deprivation tank to find Will.

She reached the bench and looked at Mike, "This is where you asked me to go to the Snowball with you."

Mike felt alarmed, what if she told the guys...

"You also kissed me here for the first time."

'SHIT', Mike looked at the gang from the corner of his eyes. Max was laughing, but the rest of them seemed like they had just discovered a scandal. Then a multitude of voices rang in the air;

"You sly fox. While we were fighting for our lives, you were sucking her face?"

"Eleven didn't get food, Lucas. She was hungry before the monster took her. Of course, she didn't get any food. You were fooling around with her."

"I was stuck in the upside down, and the demo-gorgon was pushing a pipe down my throat. And you were asking her out to the Snowball?"

They were all laughing, the nightmares were over, and the hardships seemed like yesterday. Mike joined them, and all the pain and suffering vanished in a gust of wind.

Eleven was still taking in the sight around her. Suddenly she felt a tinge of hunger in her stomach. She thought about telling Mike, but he was so excited to show her around, she decided to let it go for now. She had received training in the lab to suppress her hunger and could go on for a long time without food. Mike suddenly stopped and looked at her earnestly, "Eleven? Are you hungry?"

Eleven was shocked, *'how did Mike know?'*

"It's okay Mike."

"No, it's not. You're hungry, and we're going to the cafeteria right now." Mike gripped her hand and dragged her towards the staircase.

That's how Eleven found herself in the cafeteria, waiting in line for food. She kept looking at Mike's face. He appeared healthy, but something was wrong. She could feel it but had no idea what. They took the food and started searching for a table. Eleven saw an empty table by the window and moved towards it. She reached the table and sat down on a chair, leaving a space beside her for Mike. She turned around and saw them hanging at the back, still waiting with their plates. They looked concerned, Mike looked like as if he was preparing for the end of the world. Eleven had no idea what was happening, but she waved her hand towards them and flashed a smile. Suddenly there was a thump at the table. She gently turned around and came face to face with a group of large boys and a mean looking girl. One of the boys moved towards her and shouted, "Who the fuck do you think you are? You have the guts to sit on our table? Don't you know who we are? Leave now."

Eleven remembered what Mike had told her about using her powers, she decided to get up and leave. But suddenly the nice-looking professor from the class came from nowhere and stood in front of the boys.

"Uh... Mr. Clarke... Sir."

"You want to drag this further? All the way to detention for four consecutive weekends?"

In response, the boys ran away from there. Mr. Clarke smiled at Eleven, "Jim told me to check up on you. He was scared that others may try to bully you. He requested me to keep an eye out for trouble for the first few days. So, if anyone bothers you again, please come to my office."

The gang arrived and proceeded to take their seats around the table. Before leaving, Mr. Clarke suddenly asked Mike, "Jane reminds me of that cousin of yours who came to school last year. Eleanor, right? How's she doing?"

Dustin answered the question because Mike had suddenly lost the ability to move his jaw muscles. Then Mr. Clarke left, and they started eating. Mike had a distant look on his face, and Eleven began to feel worried, *'What is wrong with Mike?'*

Max had gone to get some beverages. She came back to the table and placed six cans of coke on the table. An image flashed in front of Eleven's eyes and her face twisted in pain. She remembered the cold white room, Papa giving her instructions on how to use her powers and the man in white clothes who had hit her with a metal rod that started a fire through her body. She nearly gagged and was about to turn her face away when Mike picked up the can and threw it out of the window. Others sitting on the table watched in horror as Mike picked up every can and threw them through the window one by one. Then he placed his palm below Eleven's right ribcage and gently whispered in her ears, "It's okay. They didn't know. I'll tell them. Please don't be hurt."

His voice was shaking.

Eleven was shocked, she had never told Mike or Hopper about the test with the coke can, *'How did he know? How did he know where the man in white clothes had hit me with the metal rod? Why is he crying? And why is he hugging me so tightly now?'*

Eleven gently placed her hands on Mike's shoulders while he hugged her in front of the entire cafeteria. Eleven was worried, she needed to ask Mike a question. She was sure that he wouldn't lie, but she wasn't sure if she was ready to hear the truth. *'Does Mike know who I really am?'*

### **3. Act III: Unleashed**

#### **Summary for the Chapter:**

The two hounds have finally discovered the trail and they would hunt their prey until the end of time.

#### **Episode 2: Gravity**

#### **Act III: Unleashed**

Michael Brown was a tough son a bitch. He had been a journalist for far too long, he had been attacked before, he had been shot once, he had been almost beaten to death on multiple occasions. So, it did not surprise him when he woke up tied to a chair in a well-lit room. He opened his eyes and cursed loudly as he realized that he was sitting on a stage. Hundreds of old and empty chairs lined the space in front of him. He realized that he was in a run-down theatre and he had no idea why. He heard a strange sound coming from his right, he turned his head and saw a tall man polishing a knife on a piece of lather. The man stopped the blade and looked at Michael,

"Welcome to the greatest show on earth." The man had a French accent.

"I swear if this is a prank, I'll...."

"No prank mister journalist, you have an audience."

Michael turned his head, and his heart stopped. His girlfriend was tied to a chair in front of the stage. She was apparently unconscious, and her head sagged below her shoulder.

"THE FUCK? WHAT THE FUCK?"

The men smiled, "It's an encore."

Michael calmed himself. He had faced danger before, "What do you want?"

"Salvation Mr. Brown. I want salvation." A voice spoke from the shadows.

At that exact moment, Michael knew in his guts that he was completely fucked. A man with a headful of white hair walked out from behin the curtains.

"You? You did this? Who the fuck *ARE* you?"

"You ask redundant questions, Mr. Brown."

"What do you want?"

The men sighed, he didn't like redundant questions.

Michael breathed. Martin Brenner was not just an evil scientist, he was also a psychopath. He needed to keep his head leveled, "What do you want from me?"

"That's the good question. I want you to disappear from this world." Martin had a finality in his voice.

Michael had made many enemies in his life. He always ran after the truth, and that pissed off too many people. But something felt odd about this interaction. He tried to remember the discussion he had with his source back in the bar.

"MKULTRA! Is that what this is all about?"

The men grimaced, "You are persistent."

"Look. I've already published the piece. I can't take it back. But I won't publish the second part. I'll disappear, just as you want." Michael was bargaining now; his girlfriend was still passed out cold.

"No, Mr. Brown. I know what you are. You're driven by a false sense of morality. I've read your earlier work covering Vietnam war, Bangladesh War, Lebanese Civil War, Iraq-Iran War amongst others. You think you are a beacon of truth in the vast sea of darkness covering the world."

Michael stared at Martin in defiance. What this man was describing

was the absolute truth. Michael Brown was not a man who was motivated by fame or money. He had always chased the fact like a hound and never backed down even in the face of impossible odds. He had fought for those who couldn't defend themselves and won their wars with nothing but pen and paper. In his latest stint, he had blown the cover of a secret project run by the CIA named 'MKUltra.' He had discovered the tragedies surrounding the Project, went in like a one-man army and made so much noise that the Congress had to appoint a committee to investigate the lunacy. He was about to publish the second part of the article to erase a monster from the face of the planet. The fiend was standing in front of him right now.

"I'm familiar with your work. If not today then tomorrow, if not tomorrow then next week, if not next week then next month, if not next month then next year, you WILL try to stop me again. You'll come after me as long as both of us are alive."

Michael gritted his teeth, "You stole those children from their parents. You destroyed their lives. YOU MURDERED THEIR INNOCENCE."

"No. Mr. Brown. I am saving them from themselves."

Then Martin turned towards the other man and started talking if Michael didn't exist, "The Church committee is too much invested in the project. Someone else is driving them from behind. We're moving our timeline. We test the final Control Matrix for Subject Eleven tonight."

"Tonight? Is she ready?" The other man sounded concerned.

Martin hardened his jaw, "No, she isn't. But she's our greatest asset. If anyone can pull through, then she can."

Then he sighed, "If she can't, I want you to get rid of the body by tonight. Then blow town and meet me at Hawkins. We're going back."

Michael felt the impending doom. They had started ignoring him as if his fate had already been decided. He needed to buy time. He didn't know why but he needed to stall these men at all costs. He chose to

prod further, "What's Subject Eleven? What's a Control Matrix?"

Martin looked at him in a staggered manner, as if he was hearing a dead man speaking. Then he laughed, "You like stories, Mr. Brown? Let me tell you a story. Maybe you can cover it in the afterlife."

Martin went in front of the stage and spread his arms to his sides as if he was delivering a sermon.

"A weapon starts out as a piece of metal. You take it to a forge, pump the flames and heat it till it starts glowing red hot. Then you start beating it with a hammer until it starts taking shape. Are you with me Mr. Brown?"

He didn't wait for the answer, "Then once it reaches its final form, you cool it down, take it to a grinding wheel and start sharpening the edges. It's a hectic process, and most shards don't make it through. Do you give up?"

Martin spoke with determination, "No, you discard the failures and start again."

Michael felt a fuse going off inside his head, he had figured out what the man was talking about. But it made no sense, "THEY WERE JUST CHILDREN!"

Martin didn't flinch, "They are more than what they seem to be."

He continued, "Most of our test subjects do not survive the Ascension Mechanism. It's a sorry state of affairs. We were having a lot of problems with the bodies. Not to mention the parents. Just some time ago, a woman came after us with a vengeance and nearly shut us down."

Michael knew the woman, in fact, he had visited her in the past. He had taken one look at the woman and swore to destroy the psychopath who had taken her soul away. Teresa Ives was the victim of a tragedy orchestrated by this man. Michael was the weapon that would bring forth vengeance in her name.

"Then it clicked. What if we could get our metal and the world kept chasing after a ghost? Then I found Mr. Louise right next door. He is

a ghost and very good at his job." The tall man, Louise, gave a bow.

"We would identify the targets. Mr. Louise here would take care of the parents and bring the subjects to us. In case the subjects didn't make it through, he would also take care of the bodies. It fuels his addiction and gives us our candidates. It's the perfect cover and it really helped with the accelerated program," Martin was pleased with himself.

Michael looked at the chair opposite to him and tears came into his eyes. He knew that it was too late to save her. This man had no conscience at all. He would still try; "Let her go. I am the one who you really want."

Martin crouched in front of the other chair, "No Mr. Brown. People who have lost something become spirits and hunt their prey till the end of time. Both of you need to go away."

Then he stood up and nodded towards Louise who grinned like a child who had just received a gift. Michael had heard about this man. 'The Director' had a gruesome way of killing people. Martin started walking towards the door with a smooth gait.

He was on the verge of breaking down, but he glared at Martin and spoke his last words; "We might be gone, but someone will take our place. YOU CAN NOT RUN FROM JUSTICE."

Martin stopped dead in his tracks. He stood there for a moment and then turned back. Michael saw the fury in his eyes, a hellfire was raging in those bottomless pits. Martin spoke the next words as if he was having difficulty pronouncing them, "I HAVE NEVER RUN AWAY FROM ANYTHING IN MY LIFE."

Martin wasn't speaking those words to Michael or The Director. He was shouting them to the empty seats in front of the stage. Then he slammed the door on his way out. Michael swallowed and looked at Louise. The man smiled cheerfully and then crouched in front of his girlfriend. She was still sleeping, but then the man took out a bottle, opened the cap and held it beneath her nose. She came awake in a few minutes and felt a horrible pain on her cheek.

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Two police cruisers raced through the night in some random part of New York City. Their tires were spewing blue smoke as they drifted along corners at very high speed. They swerved through a final curve and came to a halt in front of a run-down theatre. Five police officers got off the cabs and started jogging towards the back door.

"Hopper, you sure this is the place?" The officer at the back asked the leader.

"We know the dates of the murders committed by the director. This is one of the four theatres in the city which hosted plays on those exact dates. And this is the only theatre which never hosted plays outside those dates."

"But he kills at random locations, he could just take the dates from the paper. He could just use the proxy. Hell, he could be a patron of the fine arts as well." The man was not convinced.

"We're not here to find a criminal. Today's not even a date. We're here to find the guy who owns this place, talk to him and go through his list of patrons. After that, we hit the next three theatres on the list."

"It's too big of a jump, don't you think?"

"Have some faith on *Lady Luck*."

Hopper was about to reach the back door when he saw a sedan approaching them. It was late, and he couldn't see inside the car, but he caught a glimpse of a man with white hair. The sedan picked up speed and went around the corner. Hopper reached the back entrance and placed his ear to the door, then he pulled away in shock as he heard a muffled scream coming from inside. In a moment, a battering ram crashed against the door, and Hopper charged through with his shotgun and came face to face with his prey.

A tall man was standing on the stage with a knife in his hand, there was a man tied in a chair to his right and a woman tied to a chair to his left. The woman was nearly dead, the signs of the tall man's knife

were clear throughout her body. Hopper had seen marks like that before, only this time, they were still fresh. The man tied to the chair was sobbing historically. His mouth was covered with sticky tape. Hopper gritted his teeth and moved towards the tall man, the shotgun pointed straight towards his chest.

"Well well, the police! Someone there has some brain after all."

Hopper moved his eyes towards the woman and grimaced. She had wounds all over her body, and they were all bleeding heavily. She was suffering from immense pain, but she couldn't scream for some reason. Hopper looked at her mouth and almost threw up. *'This was the work of the devil.'* Images flashed by his eyes, images that he could never forget. Before coming down to the theatre, he had visited a ditch near the dry docks. Some workers had found a body and called it in. He reached there, went close to the body and then threw up his breakfast along with the coffee. Hopper was a veteran of war, but even his eyes couldn't believe what it was seeing. The body was severely mutilated beyond recognition, but it had belonged to a small girl once. Hopper's wife would soon be giving birth to a baby girl as well. The child would be born in a world where monsters roamed around looking for prey, either within a prison or outside one. *'What if this body was my baby girl's?'*

Hopper hardened his jaw and walked towards the man who was smiling for some god damn reason. Hopper realized that the man had no remorse, no regret and no intention to stop. He didn't deserve redemption because there was something fundamentally wrong with him. *'He needs to go back to his maker to claim warranty.'*

Hopper looked calmly at the man standing in front of him. He was as tall as Hopper, and his chest was right in front of the barrel of his shotgun.

"I have the right to remain silent? Anything I say will be held...." The tall man was smiling and reciting his Miranda rights. Hopper waited for the man to finish and as soon as he was done, he confirmed, "You do."

The Remington roared to life and the top half of The Director's body disappeared in a cloud of red mist.

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Mike and the guys were standing at the entrance to the gym. In front of them, Max was teaching Eleven about riding skateboards. She had tried to use her powers at first, but then Max put a stop to that, "This is not how it's done Eleven. You can't always rely on your powers. Haven't you seen superhero movies? Superman has his kryptonite."

Eleven had asked Mike multiple times about what happened back in the cafeteria, but Mike kept evading the question. He requested Eleven to withdraw the question because he didn't want to lie to her. He promised to tell her when the time would be right. So, Eleven decided to trust Mike and give him some time.

Eleven tried getting back onto the skateboard but fell down again. She jumped back up and looked at Mike who flashed him an enthusiastic smile. Eleven groaned and placed a foot on the skateboard. Before she could push the board using her other foot, Max put her arm on Eleven's shoulder, "It takes a lot of time and practice. You can't just rush things. You have to go through a bit of pain, but once you learn to control it, you become an expert. You will never fall again."

Eleven flashed a weak smile and tried getting back on the skateboard. She turned the skateboard around and froze as her eyes fell on Mike. Others did not notice it, but Mike was standing still as if he was in a trance. Eleven jumped on the skateboard and pushed on the ground with her powers. A few people in the gym noticed the skateboard that was speeding as if it was powered by a V8 engine. Eleven reached Mike in a flash and jumped off the skateboard. She held her fall using her powers as the skateboard zoomed forward and shattered into pieces after hitting the wall.

Mike remembered seeing Eleven getting onto the skateboard, he also remembered seeing Max putting her arm on Eleven's shoulder and whispering something. Then he found himself strapped to a metallic chair in a room with white walls and ceiling. Some weird contraption was placed around his head, and he couldn't move it at all. He was back into a memory fragment, and he was pissed off. Eleven came to school at long last, and he wanted to spend as much time with her as possible. He knew that he would be going back to reality after some

time, and in the real world, only a few seconds would have passed since his soul went missing. But the memories often left traumatic aftermath and ruined his day. He was witnessing the memory through Eleven's eyes, and he could sense the fear that was crawling through her heart. He wanted to wake up from this nightmare as soon as possible.

Suddenly a figure came into his field of vision. He moved his eyes to the front and saw the woman with the golden hair smiling at him, "Hey sweetheart. It's time for the final test. Once this is done, we can go have waffles, okay?" She looked scared as if the next few moments would decide whether she gets to live or die a horrible death. Mike knew that she was lying through her teeth, but he was stuck in a video that had been recorded earlier. He could only see it and contemplate later.

The woman lost her composure, and her voice started cracking, "This is going to hurt a bit. But we're sure that you can pull through. Just focus on my voice as I guide you, okay? Once it's done, you'll become extremely powerful. Papa will be pleased with you."

*Martin Brenner*, all the memories Eleven had with that man was disturbing and painful. Mike wanted to rip the harnesses and run away, but they were too strong. He kept looking at the woman, she disappeared for a moment to get something and came back with a piece of paper. Mike squinted his eyes. He had seen that paper before but couldn't remember where. The woman put it up on a board made of glass and hung it in front of Mike's face. Mike read the text inscribed at the top of the board, "Control Matrix – Inhibition Override"

It made no sense at all. Suddenly a man with white hair appeared beside the woman. Mike's swallowed as Martin Brenner shouted at the woman, "ABORT THE TEST. Someone found Louise."

The woman was visibly shocked, "What? Who?"

"Some random officer who got extremely lucky. I told that idiot to use a different place. But NOO, Mr. know-it-all had to use that fucking stage of his tonight. Something about an encore."

"We can ring him out before he blows our cover, right?"

"That won't be necessary. The bastard has a hole in his chest."

The woman still didn't look relieved, "What do we do? We need more subjects. The new ones can't even make it past the second trial. Thirteen was the better of the lot but still couldn't make through the third trial. That leaves Eight and Eleven as the prime candidates, and frankly, I don't think Eight has the potential. It all boils down to Eleven now. What if she can't survive the Ascension?"

Martin moved the glass panel away and spoke calmly, "No. She'll survive. She's the one who will bring salvation to this world."

He smiled at Mike, "You think it was just luck that someone caught up to Louise by chance? You think it was a coincidence that Teresa managed to get her hands on a Control Matrix? You think it was a miracle that the old geezer finally managed to create the anti-hemorrhage medicine today? You think it's a magic that helped Michael Brown escape his fate tonight?"

Martin took a pause and started releasing the harnesses that held Mike in place, "My daughter is the child of Destiny. When she wants something, the world conspires to fulfill her desires. When she seeks vengeance, demons from the deepest depths of hell rise to avenge her. When she seeks refuge, angels from the farthest corners of heaven descend to protect her. Eleven has the power to do the impossible."

Martin finished releasing the harnesses and gently helped Mike to sit up, "My daughter is like a massive star that attracts planets towards its core. Her emotions are like gravity that generates bonds that are impossible to escape from. It's about time we do something about it. I have a few ideas."

Martin looked at the woman and smiled triumphantly, "We have found our sword. We do not need any other subject. Purge the rest and blow the lab. We're going home."

Martin put a hand on Mike's head and smiled, "Hey Eleven. I've got good news. We're moving to a place called Hawkins. It's a nice place

without so many people. You'll love it there." He looked as if he had finally made a choice and felt satisfied with the consequences.

Mike was dumbfounded, he always believed that Eleven had stayed inside the lab for her entire life, '*Where in the world was she before coming to Hawkins?*' Then a flashbulb went off in front of his eyes, and a moment later he opened his eyes to see Eleven's face looming over his head. He also noticed that her face was upside down and to top it off, he was basically lying on the ground with his head on Eleven's lap. He wanted to commit Seppuku, '*the shame.*'

Eleven gently lifted his face to hers and whispered, "Mike. You need to answer the question, now." Mike just nodded, it was time to confess his darkest moment to Eleven.

*'The Field of the Fireflies.'*

It was time to confront her past, together.

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A week after blowing a hole through a man's chest, Hopper was sitting in front of the chief's office on the third floor of the NYPD HQ. He was summoned after two hours.

"Good afternoon Jim."

Hopper wanted this to get over with, "Hey boss."

"You were almost on your way to prison for murder. But then I received a call from a senator, someone heading the Church Committee. He pulled some strings and got you out. You are either damn lucky, or you have a guardian angel out there."

Hopper looked up in shock, he was sure that he would be going to jail.

"The DA's agreed to a deal. The man was going to kill a woman, and you tried to stop him. But he didn't listen and tried attacking you, so you had to take the shot. I think no one will try to seek retribution for the director. The last body was too gruesome."

Jim nodded, he was feeling relieved. He wanted to be there when his daughter would be born. He also prepared for what was about to come in his way.

"But you need to go away Jim" The chief growled softly and banged his hand on the table, "We need to bury this thing in a place where the sun doesn't shine."

"I'll quit the force. I'll get another job, maybe as a security guard."

The old man smiled, "No. You are a damn good officer, and the world could use someone like you. I have a better idea. There's a position open at a place called Hawkins in Indiana. Small town, no crimes reported in the last decade. There's an energy lab run by the government but not much commercial activity. Perfect place to disappear from the world in my opinion. You still get to be a police officer, and you can return to New York after, I don't know, a decade or so?"

Hopper stood up to leave. He went to the door and stopped for a second.

"Jim?"

Hopper ripped his badge off and threw it to the chief, "I'm not sorry for what I did. I'll do it again if I have to." Then he walked out.

*In a certain place, at a certain time, a badge was ripped from a uniform as a man swore an oath to deliver justice to the world.*

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"Michael Brown became Murray Bauman and left his life behind. It was required to protect Lisa," Murray lowered his head.

"I didn't publish the second article. Lisa was in the hospital for a long time and was exposed to danger."

"How's she doing?" Nancy wanted to stop herself but needed to know everything about the psychopath.

"She spent nearly a month in the hospital, and a group of brilliant plastic surgeons restored part of her face. She could finally eat after three months. But she never got her speech back. And then came the trauma."

Murray grimaced, "She was never able to sleep for more than two hours. The man with the knife would slice her dreams and then she would wake up screaming and panting for breath."

Nancy remembered Mike and Eleven as they were holding each other during the dance. Then an image flashed by her eyes, Mike was holding Eleven's hand tightly as she was trying to leave him at the hospital. She inhaled deeply, *'That monster had left ruins wherever he went. He needed to be stopped.'*

"I'm sorry Murray. I wish that we could do something."

"Every night leads to morning, Nancy. One day, an old geezer came out of nowhere, rescued Lisa from her nightmare and brought her to the light. He was a psychiatrist, and he was very good at reading and understanding people's emotions. Last year she left the country to live with her parents. Finally, she can sleep without crying, " Murray grinned a smile through the pain and tears.

Then he gritted his teeth, "It's not over, NOT YET. I found him once, I'll find him again and when I do...."

Jonathan spoke up, "You'll kill him?"

"No. I'll expose him for the monster that he is. There is someone else who will deliver justice."

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Hopper took a shotgun out of the bag. It was the same Remington 870 that had erased a monster from this earth, it was around 7 pounds in weight. Someone left it on his porch in NY the night before he was going to move to Hawkins. There was a small note attached to the weapon, *'Justice.'* He put the gun away and held the victim's photograph under the light. He always thought that 'The Director'

numbered his victims out of sheer lunacy, but he noticed the number carefully this time. It was etched at the girl's wrist. '013,' the font was too similar. A font that he had seen on Eleven's wrist. A font that was the mark of the devil.

Hopper always wanted to find out whether Eleven was born with the telekinetic powers or there was something inside her that made her more suitable for imparting these powers. *'He never got to know whether it was Jane Ives or Terry Ives who was selected by destiny to become a weapon or give birth to one.'* But now that he had a clue, he needed to see the old case files.

The hounds have unleashed at long last, they would hunt their prey till the end of time.

## Epilogue

It was a quiet night somewhere far away from Hawkins, Indiana. A cold wind was rustling through the concrete maze and trying its best to vanquish the fire that was providing warmth to the huddled masses spread around it. A radio crackled, and someone from the group answered it,

"What the fuck do you want?"

"Its time to move. Someone was spotted snooping around the castle."

A figure jumped up from the group and went to a corner, "Do you have eyes on the target?"

"Not yet, but a little birdie told me that they are trying to find Eleven's control matrix."

A moment later, four shadows walked away from the warmth and vanished into the night as the fire yielded to the wind.

It was a beautiful morning somewhere near Hawkins, Indiana. Hopper was making breakfast for two. He made pancakes and eggs.

Then he went to the refrigerator and took out some Eggos. Today was a grand day, Eleven would be going to school, and later tonight she'll have her first grand birthday party. Joyce didn't cut any corners while making the arrangements. Eleven was taking longer to get ready today, but Hopper understood her excitement. He casually walked to the TV and switched the channel to the news. Then he rammed his coffee cup through the screen as Eleven walked out. Her face was masked by shock and horror, "You broke the TV?"

"A poisonous insect was sitting on the screen, so I squashed it. You don't need a TV now because you'll be with Mike for the better part of the day. We're getting a new TV by the end of the week. Okay?" Hopper sounded like a person facing the firing squad.

"Okay, I don't need a TV right now." Eleven flashed a smile and sat at the table.

Hopper swallowed and sat opposite to her, he could still remember part of the breaking news,

*'... has gone up in flames. The firefighters are still trying to douse the flames, but we have the confirmation that...'*

Hopper knew that house because he had been there multiple times in the past. Hopper felt like a soldier who had pressed his foot against a landmine and couldn't take it off. The problem was that, sooner or later, he had to move.

It was a peaceful morning somewhere near an unknown curb close to a little-known street in a town called Hawkins, Indiana. Karen was driving home after dropping Mike at school. He would be spending the night at the Byers. Joyce was throwing a grand party for Jane's birthday, who was Mike's date for the Snowball and Mike was a special guest. Karen felt really happy for some reason, *'My boy's all grown up. Jane is a beautiful girl. '*

Yet she couldn't shake the feeling off that she had seen that girl somewhere before. Suddenly she suddenly pressed the break as hard as she could, and the car screeched to a halt. Karen kept looking

through the windscreen as if she had seen a ghost, '*The birthday party! Jane Hopper! Jane Ives! Teresa Ives! The birth date coincides with the approximate date Teresa told me. Now that I remember, she does have some resemblance to Jane. Is it possible...?*'

She started the engine, drove the car as fast as she could and reached home in a short time. She was about to turn the car towards the garage when she saw an unknown car in her driveway. The doors were open, and the engines were still running. Karen felt the urgent need to enter her home, she stopped the car in the driveway and ran towards the main door. She yanked the door open, ran inside and screamed at the scene in front of her.

***The saga continues in 'Armageddon Part 3' (Airing Now).***